

Analyzing the Antecedents and Consequences of Brand Love with a Case Study on Apple Cell phone Users

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Abstract

Today facing with unstable nature of consumers' needs makes it crucial for companies attract and maintain loyal customers to their brands. Therefore due to the importance of brand love in attaining this goal the aim of this study was to analyze the antecedents and consequences of brand love from the viewpoint of Apple cellphone users in Isfahan. To achieve this goal an innovative model was developed and the impact of product involvement and self-brand congruity as the antecedents of brand love were investigated and then the influence of brand love on continuance and affective commitment as its consequences were examined. In order to examine the main hypothesis Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Amos graphic have been used. The results imply that product involvement and self-brand congruity affect brand love and users' brand love influence their continuance and affective commitment.

Keywords: Product involvement, Self-Brand Congruity, Brand Love, Continuance Commitment, Affective Commitment

Introduction

There are numerous brands in the world, but only strong brands can be a great basis for building customer loyalty (Keller, 2007). But recent studies have shown that satisfaction is not enough to make customers loyal. Most of satisfied customers tend to competitors'

brand(Sarkar,2011). Thus recently marketers have been introducing a new variable titled brand love(Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Ahuvia et al., , 2007).

Customers can view a brand as an individual, so they can love a brand as they love a person. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have stated that brand love is a blend of emotion and passion of an individual for a brand. Today companies have recognized that feeling of love toward a brand is a vital factor in establishing a good relationship with customers(Roberts,2006).Those brands which can make customers love their brands are more successful in gaining sustainable advantage and beating their competitors.

If a consumer loves a brand, he/she stays by that brand, ignores company's mistakes and even helps that firm fixes them(www.brandlove.com,2012).

Researches in which the concept of brand love and its antecedents and outcomes has been investigated are few. Previous studies have indicated that there are factors affecting customers' feeling of love such as satisfaction, individual romanticism, brand experience and brand trust(Sarkar,2011).The impact of brand love on willing to pay premium price, incidence of positive word of mouth and creation of loyalty in customers as important outcomes of this variable (Sarkar,2011) has also proved. But in this study and for the first time the impact of consumers' product involvement and self-brand congruity as antecedents of brand love have been examined. In addition the influence of brand love on continuance and affective commitment as its consequences has also investigated.

In developing this paper, we will begin with a brief review of research constructs include: product involvement, self-brand congruity, brand love and continuance and affective commitment. After that we will present our theoretical point of view and propositions and finally we will end up with contributions and conclusions of this research.

Literature Review

Product Involvement: Today, building a strong brand, protecting that against competitors' threats and making customers dedicated to that, requires proper understanding of consumer behavior. Thus investigating the variables of consumer behavior, can help marketers understand this concept better. Product involvement as a variable of consumer behavior affects customer's buying process through influencing their attitudes (Saied Nia and Jamali Nejad, 2010).

Product involvement indicates that to what extent a particular product category is important for consumer and plays a fundamental role in his/her life. According to Zaichkowsky product involvement is commonly defined as a consumer's enduring perceptions of the importance of the product category based on the consumer's inherent needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Previous researches have shown that product involvement can affect the decision-making process regarding a product, the extent to which consumers will search for information about the product, the way in which the consumer's attitudes and preferences regarding the product are influenced and the consumer's perceptions of options in the same product category(Charters and Pettigrew, 2006; Harari and Hornic,2010).

One of the characteristics of product involvement is its intensity which divides this variable on a continuum from low involvement to high involvement. As the level of involvement increases, consumers have a greater incentive to gain, understand and analyze the information about the purchase of a product. In addition people who are highly involvement carry into deeper information processing (Moven and Minor,2009)While those with low involvement accept new information much easier(Mital,1995).Thus product involvement construct is critical to understanding consumer behavior and can influence his/her attitudes through product's brand.

Self-Brand Congruity: Consumer behavior literature indicates that behavioral phenomena such as attitude toward the brand, preference, selection, purchasing and ownership, satisfaction and brand loyalty are determined not only by functional aspects, but also strongly affected by symbolic criteria(Park et al,. 1986).

Some authors believe that consumers buy products for their symbolic values(Moven and Monor,2010). Brands and products are symbols that reflect individual's identity to othersThus consumer may decide to buy a product because he/she feels that the product enhances his/her own self-concept(Sung and Choi, 2012).

Previous studies have shown that in interpersonal relationships, individuals attract to those who have similar personality traits to them(Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). Today, consumers choose brands which are consistent with the four dimensions of their self-concept (actual self, ideal self, actual social self, ideal social self)(Sirgy, 1985;Koksal and Demir, 2012). Self-congruity refers to the degree of match between an individual's perception of a brand or product and the perception they have of themselves (Sirgy ans Su, 2000).

Self- brand congruity is an important element in consumer behavior. As the congruity between self-concept and brand image increases, favorable attitudes toward the brand, and thus favorable behavior (eg purchase of that brand) will be observed(Louis and Lombart, 2010).Studies have indicated that self-brand congruity can positively influence brand satisfaction, purchase intention and brand choice(Khan and Bozzo, 2012).

Brand Love: An individual can love a brand as he/she loves another person. The structure of this consumer-brand love is very similar to interpersonal love and attachment(Caroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Previous studies have shown that loving a brand can lead to loyalty. Thus marketers had better try to make customers love their brand in order to keep up with competitors.

In 1986 Sternberg proposed the Triangular Theory of Love. According his definition interpersonal love includes three dimension titled: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. When individuals feel close to each other, this is called intimacy. Passion is largely, but not exclusively derived from the motivational involvement which leads to different forms of physical and psychological arousals. Decision/commitment is the cognitive element.When partners recognize the feeling of love to each other, decision has formed and if they have desire to continue this relationship, commitment has appeared.

In the field of consumption Shimp and Madden (1988) used the theory of Sternberg and proposed liking, yearning and decision/commitment as three dimensions of consumer-object relationship. Liking refers to the intimate feelings for a brand. Yearning refers to the passion for

a brand which takes the form of different types of arousal. Decision refers to the individual's recognition of the liking and yearning for the brand in short-term. Commitment refers to the individual's repeat purchase of the same brand over a longer period of time in future.

According to Shimp and Madden (1988) when liking (intimacy) and yearning (passion) present in the consumer-brand relationship this type of bond can be called brand love. Actually because of the presence of some external constraints like family pressure or low income, an individual may not show any commitment to that brand(Sarkar,2011).

Brand love is an emotional and passionate feeling of an individual for a particular trade name(Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Consumers, who are in real love with a brand, will stick to it in order to avoid separation distress. When they fall in love with a brand, they feel that the brand explodes their fancy and satisfies their senses(Amin and Danielson,2012). Thus recently because of the importance of this construct in companies' success, marketers have been prioritizing emotional branding in their strategies.

Commitment: Commitment is the tendency to maintain a valuable relationship (Hennig-Thurau and Hansen, 2000). This psychological variable was introduced by Porter et al., in organizational field in 1971. In marketing, brand commitment is long-lasting consumer desire to continue his/her relationship with a particular brand(Suh and Han, 2003; Ercis et al., 2012).

Consumers tend to establish close and emotional connection with the brand that has made them feel pleasure and in the other hand consumers who are more committed to a brand feel closer to that (Keh et al., 2007). Brand commitment in short time is defined as the tendency to establish a relationship with the brand and is the desire to maintain this bond in long term.

Continuance Commitment: This kind of commitment is defined as the weak feelings of individual towards a brand. This bond is not strong because in this relationship due to high switching cost and not accessing to another proper option, consumer has to stay with the brand(Ercis et al., , 2012). In the other word if consumer feels that another options offer better benefits he/she change the brand so easily. Fullerton (2003) expressed continuance commitment as a risky effect on the consumer willingness to involve in advocacy intentions.

Affective Commitment: Affective commitment is the emotional link with the brand which represents strong sense of personal identifications. This type of brand commitment is based on identification and shared values with the brand (Pring, 2007)

If the relationship between a person and a brand is enjoyable, fun, full of trust and emotional attachment, in the case of remaining this communication, consumer affective commitment increases(O'Callaghan).

Previous researches have shown that continuance commitment makes consumer's behavior unstable while consumers with affective commitment have steady behavior and tend to help company improve its strength(Harrison-Walker,2001).

Methodology

Today facing with unsettled consumers' needs makes it crucial for companies attract and maintain loyal customers for their brands. But researchers have demonstrated that satisfaction alone is not enough for keeping customers loyal to brand. Thus recently a new and important

construct named brand love has emerged. It has been proved that if consumers love a brand they stay with it for long term and cannot stand the tragedy of separation.

Therefore and due to the importance of brand love in companies' success, this article has tried to investigate the antecedents and consequences of brand love in Isfahans' cellphone market. In the following we will develop our hypotheses and present the conceptual model of our research.

H1: Apple cellphone users' level of involvement in Isfahan influences the feeling of love towards Apple brand.

H2: Congruity between Apple cellphone users' self-concept in Isfahan and image of this brand influences the feeling of love towards Apple brand.

H3: Feeling of love towards Apple brand influences continuance commitment of cellphone users of this brand in Isfahan.

H4: Feeling of love towards Apple brand influences affective commitment of cellphone users of this brand in Isfahan.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of this paper.

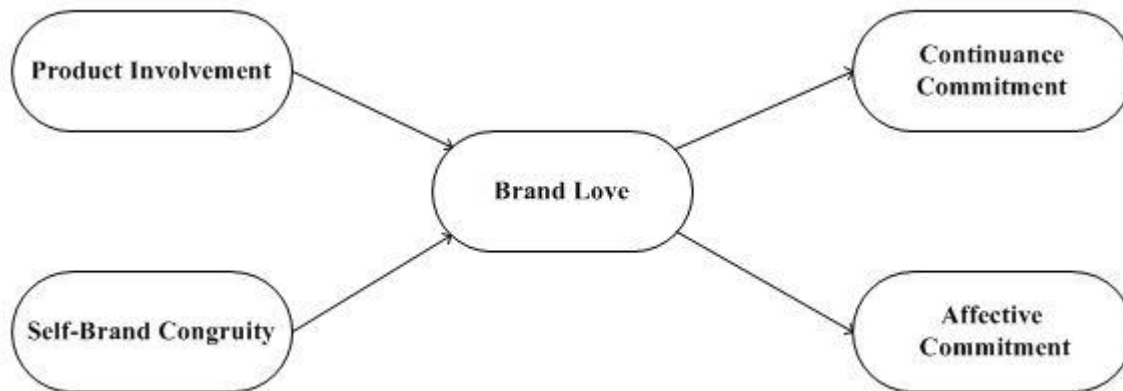


Figure1: The Conceptual Model

Sampling: In developing this paper we conducted users of Apple cellphones in Isfahan because Apple is a luxury brand.

Because of the using Structural Equation Modeling in analyzing collected data sample size was determined by $q \leq n \leq 15q$ in which q is the number of survey questions. Thus the proper sample size was calculated between 195 to 585 users. Finally from 250 distributed questionnaires, 230 acceptable questionnaires were considered for the final analysis. Of these, 138 were males and 92 were females, over 32 percent were in the range of 21 to 25 years old. Respondents were asked not to sign or give any form of identification to ensure the anonymity of their responses.

Measurement: To measure the hypotheses, a researcher made and multi-dimensional questionnaire was designed in six parts. The first part included information about participants' demographic variables such as age, gender, and job and monthly income. Other parts of the survey were conducted to measure product involvement, self-brand congruity, brand love and continuance and affective commitment. To measure the feeling of love in Apple cellphone users

Albert et al., brand love scale proposed in 2008 was used. In this scale intimacy, dream, duration, memories, idealization, uniqueness and pleasure are seven dimensions of brand love. To determine the validity of the questionnaire face and structures validity applied. For face validity 10 marketing experts assessed and modified the measurement and for evaluating structures validity confirmatory factor analysis were used. To test reliability of this measurement Cronbach’s alpha was used. The total Cronbach’s alpha was 0.913 which confirms the scale reliability.

Results and Discussion

Test of structural model: In this study, we used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for data analysis. The conceptualized model of research ran as a structural model to test research hypotheses. The method of maximum likelihood estimation in Amos Graphics 18 software was used to analyze data and hypotheses testing.

To assess the fitness of the proposed model, Cmin or chi-square/df, the Tucker –Lewis index (TLI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Relative Fit Index, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) were used (Byrne, 2010). After refining the initial structure model, all of the goodness of fit indexes was found within acceptable range indicating that the model of the research has a good fitness (Byrne, 2010).Table1.

Table-1 Goodness indicates of the structural model

Indicators	CFI	RFI	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	GFI	TLI	P
Values	0.95	0.90	1.78	0.058	0.91	0.94	0.071

Hypothesis Testing: A positive bond was found between cellphone users’ level of involvement and the feeling of love toward Apple brand ($\beta=0.423$, C.R = 5.138, $p<0.05$). Thus hypothesis 1 which mentioned that Apple cellphone users’ level of involvement in Isfahan influences the feeling of love towards Apple brand is accepted.

This result is consistent with the outcome of Saied Nia and Jamali Nejad paper (2009) which proved that product involvement affects positive attitudes towards the brand. Actually as the level of involvement increases, consumers mentally tend to a particular brand name of this product category and this can lead to creation of positive attitudes in the their mind.

As we supposed in hypothesis 2 congruity between Apple cellphone users’ self-concept in Isfahan and image of this brand influences the feeling of love towards Apple brand ($\beta=0.728$, C.R = 8.195, $p<0.05$). It means the more congruency is between consumer’s self-concept and brand image of a product the more feeling of love towards that brand is created in the heart of him/her.

This result is consistent with the findings of Khan and Bozzo(2012), Batra et al.,(2012) and Luis and Lombart (2010) studies. Today individuals by using products and brands tend to enhance different aspects their self-concept and obtain good social status in the society. Thus it’s natural that they love a brand which fit better with their personality traits.

Hypothesis 3 is accepted too. As results showed, feeling of love towards Apple brand influences continuance commitment of cellphone users of this brand in Isfahan ($\beta=0.695$, C.R = 7.948, $p<0.05$).

This outcome is consistent with the work of Keh et al., (2007) which proved that feeling of love causes positive and emotional sensation in individuals. In the other word if a consumer loves a brand he/she likes to maintain his/her relationship with that brand because advantageous benefits of that brand will be lost in the case of separation.

And finally a positive important link was found between the feeling of love toward Apple brand and users affective commitment ($\beta=0.88$, C.R = 7.52, $p<0.05$). Thus hypothesis 4 is accepted too.

This result is consistent with the outcome of Keh et al., paper in 2007. Actually when a consumer loves a brand he/she tends to save his/her emotional link with that brand in long term.

Conclusion

This study had two main purposes. First it aimed to investigate the influence of product involvement and self-brand congruity on brand love as its antecedents and then it tried to examine the impact of brand love on continuance and affective commitment as its consequences. In developing this research the Apple cellphone users in Isfahan were selected as survey population. Results showed that all supposed hypotheses are accepted.

As some of the implications of this study it can be suggested that marketers had better prioritize emotional branding strategies. For instance they should design such an attractive and passionate logo by which customers get attracted to the brand. It can be proposed that advertisements should contain more affective and emotional themes in order to make customers love the company's brand. It is recommended that managers in market segmentation had better put their emphasis on those parts in which consumers are highly involved to the product. It is also suggested that marketers had better design a kind of brand image which is fit with target market characteristics in the best way. Since brand love affects brand commitment it is recommended that managers try to provide better advantages comparing with competitors. In this way customers get attracted to the firm's brand. So, feeling of love is enhanced which can lead to consumers' commitment.

In spite of advantages and implications, our research has limitations as well. This study focused solely on a single brand. This can limit the generalization of findings to other brands available in the mobile market. In addition in this study, due to time and cost constraints, only Apple's cellphone users in Isfahan have been studied. It is likely that users in other cities of the country have different views and opinions.

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